

## Coolidge Place

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Coolidge Place is, in many ways, the typical Salt Lake City suburb. Although it was registered in 1925, most of the building there took place in the mid 1930's, a period of high building activity throughout Salt Lake City. It was subdivided by the Jeppsons, a husband and wife team, an average couple with little experience in planning who had a piece of land they wanted to use to earn money.

Because of the very ordinary layout this subdivision was given, the time it was open for building, and its location in the city, the houses built on its lots were also just like any other small houses in the valley. Lots are so small that practically nothing could be built on a single lot but one of the tiny cottages typical of this period. The people who flocked to build there in the thirties were also the ordinary folk of the city—the plumbers and salesmen who make up the bulk of the population.

Since that period, it has also followed a typical pattern of continuity and gradual decline as the houses got older and new neighborhoods moved even further from the center of the city.

Physically, the subdivision consists of one hundred and twenty acres of <sup>Q</sup> block 29 in Salt Lake City, Utah. This is between Seventh and Eighth East streets, and south of Thirty-second South. This is right at the city limits, and was about as far as development had gotten by the time the subdivision was settled. The area was still fairly rural, and even as late as the mid-1940's there were still open fields merely two or three city blocks away.

Since it was so far from the center of town, this wasn't necessarily a very desirable housing location. It is well into the center of the valley, away from any scenic attractions like the mountains or creeks. This location and layout, though compounded by careless planning, determined that the first inhabitants of the site would be low middle income families.

Coolidge Place is divided into three blocks, all narrow and rectangular, as shown on map 1. Blocks are two lots deep, with six lots across the end of each block. There are twelve lots along the side of each block. The blocks are not so long and narrow as to be unusually sized or shaped, however, and the roads are about the same width as other streets in block twenty-nine, so the area doesn't stand out. This is more likely because of basic requirements for the size of a street, however, rather than any effort on the part of the Jeppsons to design the area.

One result of this block layout is that the streets within the subdivision are not exactly in line with their continuations on the far side of Eighth East. On the other side of Seventh East is a shopping center, so there is no particular alignment with streets on that side either. The subdivider was not concerned with making this subdivision fit into any larger sort of plan for the entire neighborhood. Instead he was interested in dividing the land into conveniently sized lots.

These lots are long and narrow, averaging forty feet by one hundred and twenty, but with a few as long as one hundred ninety-eight. The lots are narrow

to minimize the number of streets necessary to serve the same number of lots, so the subdivider would maximize his earnings from land sales. Again, these lots are not so narrow as to be unusually sized or shaped. Lots in neighboring subdivisions, divided at a similar or slightly later period, ranged from nearly identical dimensions to lots of sixty feet by one hundred feet.

Sewer service, water, and street lighting were eventually supplied to this neighborhood by the city. Judging by the amount of time that went by before anyone built on a lot, this probably took place several years after the subdivision was registered.<sup>1</sup> Again, the subdivider was trying to minimize costs for himself, rather than attract any particular sort of residents to the area. Like so many other subdividers, he put in the bare minimum amenities, assuming that the land itself would be sufficient to attract residents. Although it took a few years, eventually it did this. Of course, this did nothing toward attracting higher-income residents, so the field was clear for the lower-income families who actually moved in.

Coolidge Park was developed by a husband and wife, Joseph and Christina Jeppson. Joseph worked in real estate, and Christina had no listed occupation. Joseph retired from business in 1965, and died in 1967. This means he must have been fairly young, and probably inexperienced, when Coolidge Park was developed in the 1920's. This likely explains the lack of creativity in the subdivision's layout, though it does fulfill the goal of maximizing buildable land.

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<sup>1</sup> *R. L. Polk and Co.'s Salt Lake City Directory*. R. L. Polk and Co. Salt Lake City, Utah, 1925-1993.

In laying out Coolidge Park, the Jeppsons were almost certainly more concerned with the amount of money they could earn from one piece of land, than with any design considerations in laying it out, or even any attempt to create an unusually attractive area that would attract higher-income residents. The Jeppsons were looking for the most money they could get with the least bother. This was quite common, so this quality adds to Coolidge Park's similarity to other subdivisions all over town.

Along with this unimaginative layout, the Jeppsons paid no attention to the possibility of establishing deed restrictions or architectural covenants for the suburb. These are restrictions decided on by the developer to control the sort of houses to be built on their land, the upkeep of the neighborhood, and sometimes even the sort of people who will be allowed to purchase land. This is another method the developer sometimes uses to improve the value of his or her land rather painlessly. This sort of restriction on a subdivision improves property values because it presumably prevents any undesirable additions of any sort to the neighborhood. Being in the real estate business, Joseph Jeppson probably knew about these, but decided not to use any of them in this subdivision.

The main influence on housing stock, since the Jeppsons were unconcerned with it, was the period when the houses were built. The housing stock is fairly uniform just because the houses were all built right around the

same time. There are two main housing types in the neighborhood, plus a scattering of other houses built several years before or after the majority.

Although several houses were built in the late 1920's a few years after the subdivision was established, by far the vast majority were built between 1932 and 1937. In fact, nearly half the houses in the subdivision were built in 1934 and 1935. A few more were added in the 1940's and one in the 50's, but nearly all the lots were full by then.<sup>2</sup> The houses built during this period of heavy building in Salt Lake City are all fairly similar, and are all conservative homes full of historical reference.

The houses are invariably small, ranging between 650 and 850 square feet on the main level. Only three houses in the entire subdivision have more than 1000 square feet on the main level. Most houses have a finished basement that adds another five or six hundred square feet, and a few have a finished attic that adds several hundred more. There are generally four or five rooms on the main level, though there are as many as ten in the largest houses.<sup>3</sup>

Most houses in Coolidge Park also have a separate one car garage near the back of the lot, generally on the left side of the house. These were built at the same time as the house, or a little later.

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<sup>2</sup> Salt Lake County Assessor: 1992 Records.

<sup>3</sup> Salt Lake County Assessor: 1992 Records.

The narrow lots mean that houses are located quite close to one another along the street. There is generally only enough space for a driveway between houses, with perhaps a few feet of lawn. Houses are located toward the front of the lots, leaving a comparatively large back yard. Only one or two houses in the entire subdivision are located near the back of their lots, and they stand out as very unusual.

The slightly more dominant type of housing in Coolidge Park is a historical revival cottage just like thousands of others in Salt Lake City. In this neighborhood, these are almost entirely in the English Tudor style, though high narrow gables or clipped gables are nearly the only indication of this fact. Other Tudor features that appear are arched windows and doorways, and polychrome brick. The exterior materials are generally either brick or aluminum siding.

759 Springview, shown in photo 1, is a typical example of this type of house. The house is faced with polychrome brick, in a running bond, with a decorative red band along the foundation. The roof is of asphalt shingles. It also shares the common T-shaped roof plan, with a gable parallel to the street in the front, and another gable perpendicular to that behind.

In this house, the front gable is high and narrow, a common variation in the English Tudor cottage. It changes pitch near the eaves to a shallower angle. There is a small covered entry porch on the east side of the front, covered by a cross gable which helps to show off the proportions of the roof. Four concrete steps lead up to this porch, which is three feet above grade. This porch is

entered through a round arch of red brick and just behind the arch is an arched window.

The remaining area of the front of the house is decorated with two windows in a rather irregular placement. One is a large window with three sections, and the other is a small four-paned window located high in the wall next to the entry. On the sides, the windows are located entirely to relate to the floor plan, rather than to conform to any outside order.

Inside, the spaces are small and cramped, as shown in the floor plan in diagram 1. The entry porch opens into the living room, which has a fireplace at the back. Beyond this is a small dining room, and the kitchen. The stairs leading to the basement are in the kitchen, near the back door. The bedrooms and bath are reached through a short hall leading off the dining room.

A separate two-car garage was added after the house was built, in a different color of brick. This garage structure has a large room to one side for more living space, directly behind the house. This area is attached to the house by a covered porch.

Like most of the houses in the neighborhood, 759 E. Springview is located well forward on the lot, perhaps twelve feet from the sidewalk, with the parking structure towards the back. There is quite a bit of space on the side opposite the garage, which may mean that the building is partly on a second lot.

Although this house is representative of the main housing stock in the subdivision, the houses in the neighborhood are really more notable for their

variety. The basic forms of the houses, their styles, and even materials are very similar, but the actual details of each house are entirely different. No two houses in the subdivision are identical, which gives the streets a nice sense of individuality. No doubt this is also due to the Jeppsons' non-interference in the details of the subdivision.

One main source of variety in the English Tudor houses is in the pitch of the gable parallel to the street. Several, like 759 E. Springview discussed above, are high and steep. Many others, however are much lower, and some have clipped gables as well.

The entry porches also vary widely. Some are included within the form of the building, like the one at 759 Springview. Others, like the porch on 733 Springview in photo 2, protrude five or six feet from the facade. All are covered with a gabled roof with the end facing the street, generally matching the pitch of the house's main front gable.

Some houses have another small gable facing the street next to the porch, as well. These are asymmetrically placed, which is a common form of organization in the English Tudor style. Window sizes and locations also vary widely. Entrances can be on either side of the house or in the middle, and materials include various colors of brick, plus a variety of shades of aluminum siding.

The other common housing type consists of a single gabled box, like the house in photo 3, aligned either parallel or perpendicular to the street. These are

a distant variant of a New England style cottage, and are all clad in aluminum siding of varying colors. These houses are similar in size to the English Tudor cottages, and their placement on the lots is also similar.

The several houses built before the majority, in the late 1920's, do not generally stand out among the later houses on their blocks. They are on the whole similar to the New England style cottages, and are perhaps only a little smaller than the average house built in the subdivision later. A good example of these, 782 East Springview, is shown in photo 4. This was the earliest house built in the subdivision, and evidently existed before the land was subdivided.<sup>4</sup>

There were also several houses built after the main building phase. Most of these were built in the 1940's, with one in 1952. These stand out more from the others, being generally larger and lower. They also have more parking space, on the average. 717 East Springview, shown in photo 5, was the latest of these, built in 1952. Its form is entirely different from any of the other buildings in the subdivision, although it does not include any more space than they do.

The first residents of Coolidge Park were low to middle income families. Their occupations included plumbers, salesmen, and factory laborers.<sup>5</sup> For these people, the narrow lots, distance from the center of town, and small houses combined to make a home more affordable. This factor was much more

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<sup>4</sup> Salt Lake County Assessor: 1992 Records.

<sup>5</sup> *R. L. Polk and Co.'s Salt Lake City Directory*. R. L. Polk and Co. Salt Lake City, Utah, 1925-1993.

important to them than any fancy street layout or collection of parks would have been.

In 1940, only a few years after the majority of the houses in Coolidge Park were built, the block statistics for the US Census listed the neighborhood's population as entirely caucasian.<sup>6</sup> This was unsurprising for a period when neighborhoods were nearly always entirely racially segregated. Sometimes this was accomplished by formal restrictions listed by the developer of a subdivision. The same results sometimes came about merely through the attitudes of the banks lending to the builders. Neighborhoods of mixed races were considered to be of lower value than segregated ones, and banks frequently would not lend to people wishing to build in one of these lower value neighborhoods. Hostility from neighbors also accomplished the same thing in other cases.<sup>7</sup> Even though Coolidge Park has no formal restrictions on the people who live there, either the subdivision's inhabitants or land owner managed to keep the neighborhood unmixed.

In the fifty years since Coolidge Place became an established neighborhood, there have been very few major changes. For several decades there was hardly any change at all, and now the neighborhood is experiencing a

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<sup>6</sup> Truesdell, Leon E.: *Housing Analytical Maps Salt Lake City, Utah Block Statistics*. WPA War Services. New York City, New York, 1940.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, Kenneth T.: *Crabgrass Frontier: the Suburbanization of the United States*. Oxford University Press. New York, 1985. pp 197-209.

slow decline. The small houses are not as valuable as they once were, because expectations of housing have risen,. On the whole, the neighborhood is still well-kept, but a few run-down houses and yards give the impression that the entire area is on its way down. On the other hand, several remodeling jobs going on at the time of this writing seem to indicate that the inhabitants have not given up on their neighborhood. They are still trying to make it a better and more liveable place.

Since houses throughout Coolidge Park are so small, the main changes to the housing have been small additions to give more living or storage space. These are generally enclosed porches at the rear of the house. People also finished basements to give more space, and a few houses have finished attics as well. One or two houses, like 702 East 3155 South in photo 6, were given dormers or even an entire second story. Some people converted their detached garages into storage space, or added on to its side for additional living area.

As multiple car families have become more dominant during the past fifty years, parking at Coolidge Place has become more of a problem. The original single car garages are not enough now for most households, and houses with a car or two parked in their driveways or along their curbs are common.

Homeowners have tried to remedy this problem in various ways. Like 759 E Springview, several houses have newer, multiple-car garages replacing the original single-car structure. Other owners have purchased additional lot space for their cars. One lot is entirely devoted to an asphalt parking lot between two

houses. Another holds a two car garage nearly as big as the house it serves on the lot next door.

The biggest change in the neighborhood, however, was the addition of a chapel for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in 1953. This structure takes up the west end of block three of the subdivision, including parts of eight lots. In spite of the late date the church was built, only two houses were destroyed to make space for it. It may be that the southwest corner of that block, being closer to the commercial development along Thirty-third South and Seventh East, was not as desirable a location for building houses as the others, so there were not very many houses there.

Different changes have taken place in the population of this subdivision. As Coolidge Place has grown older, so have its inhabitants, most of whom lived in the neighborhood for several decades. As the original young families of the 1930's got older, only a small proportion of them moved away. Several families even have a second generation now living on the same street as their parents did when the subdivision was settled. <sup>8</sup>

The first generation of inhabitants began to retire during the 1960's. During this period, enough of them moved out that the population of the neighborhood remained fairly young. Now, however, the people who moved in

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<sup>8</sup> *R. L. Polk and Co.'s Salt Lake City Directory.* R. L. Polk and Co. Salt Lake City, Utah, 1925-1993.

in that period are aging as well, and more than half the names on every block are listed as retired in the commercial directories.

This tends to both preserve the neighborhood and lead to its decline. Long-time residents of a house tend to keep their houses in better repair and keep their yards neater than people who do not have so much value tied up in a neighborhood. However, most retired people have a very low income and cannot devote much money to upkeep of a house.

Among the families that do have an employed member, the job status of Coolidge Place inhabitants has not changed much. Plumbers and salesmen have lived in Coolidge Place since it was subdivided, and still live there now.<sup>9</sup>

There have been some changes in the ethnic and racial diversity in the neighborhood over the past fifty years. Judging by the names in the directory and personal observation in the neighborhood there are a few ethnic and racial minorities living there now. The proportion is still small, however, and it is only in the last decade or so that they started moving into the neighborhood.

This history and these physical characteristics are what make this subdivision the typical twentieth century Salt Lake City subdivision. The Salt Lake area experienced a building boom in the 1930's, so Coolidge Park houses share their building dates with thousands of others in the valley. The fact that this neighborhood was laid out by a subdivider more concerned with his profit

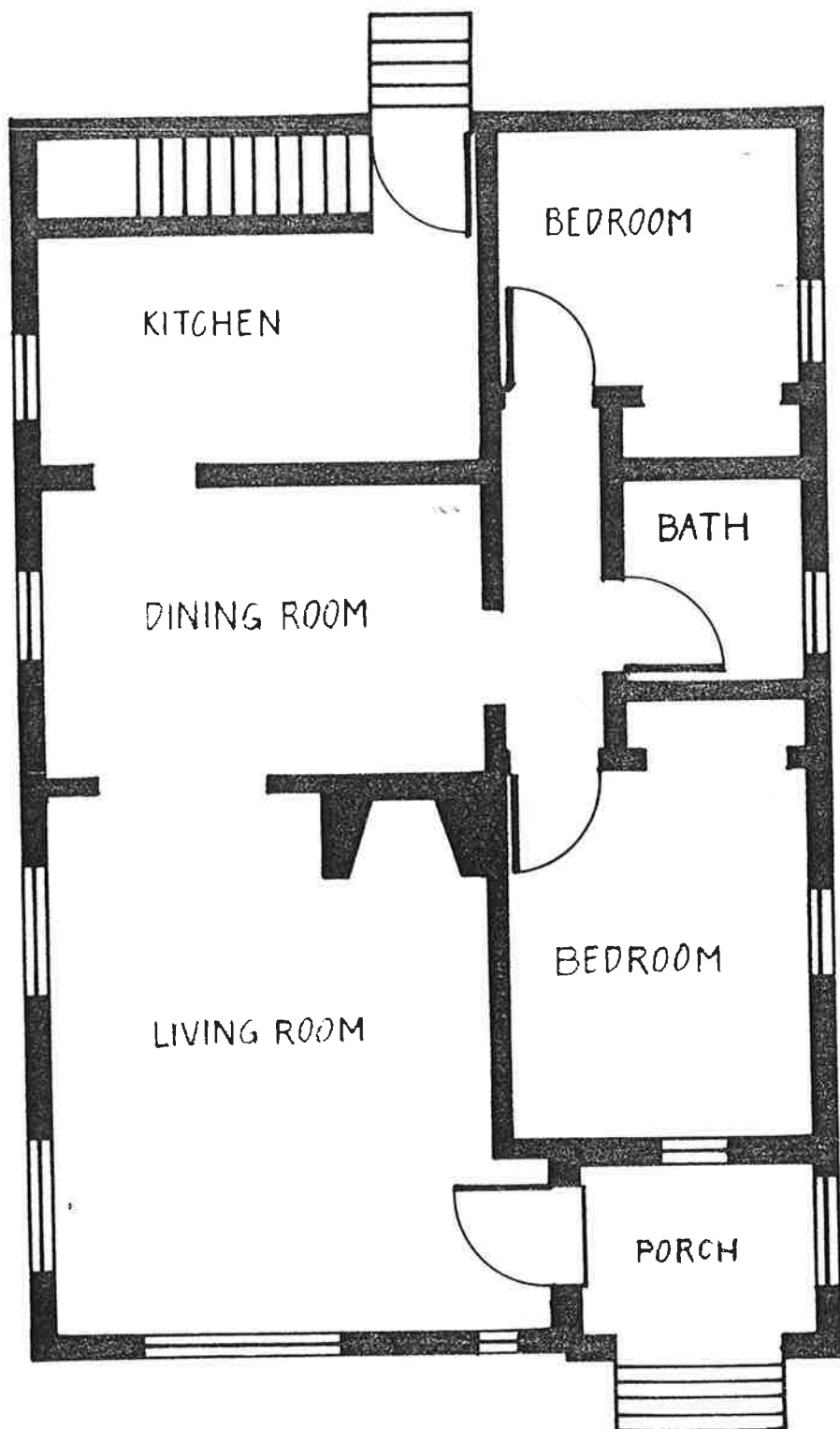
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<sup>9</sup> *R. L. Polk and Co.'s Salt Lake City Directory*. R. L. Polk and Co. Salt Lake City, Utah, 1925-1993.

than the quality of the suburb is also very common, and because of this, so is its layout of long narrow lots. Its residents were and are the ordinary people of Salt Lake, and its aging and decline follow a typical pattern. Although no subdivision in the Salt Lake area can entirely represent all the others, Coolidge Park is as close to a typical suburb as it is possible to find in the valley.

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759 E SPRINGVIEW

